



**STRATEGY
RESEARCH
PROJECT**

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**IMPROVING JUNIOR OFFICER CONFIDENCE IN
SENIOR OFFICER LEADERSHIP**

BY

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ABSTRACT

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Junior officer comments, corroborated by field grade officers and former battalion commanders (FBC) state there exists in the Army today, a crisis in confidence in senior officer leadership. The Army staff and private firms under the direction of the Army Research Institute (ARI) have gathered empirical data to grasp the magnitude of the problem and initiate corrective action. To compound the seriousness of the confidence issue, junior officers are leaving the Army's ranks in unprecedented numbers. This loss of junior leadership, if left unabated, will have a profoundly negative effect on manning the force now and into the future. It appears that there are many contributing factors to this exodus - a solid economy, no emerging near-peer military competitor, sustained high OPTEMPO, multiple deployments, and a mission shift from warfighting to disaster relief, humanitarian assistance, peacekeeping, peace enhancement and peace enforcement operations – now termed Stability and Support Operations (SASO). This paper will attempt to identify why junior officers lack confidence in their senior officers, what is the cause, and to provide recommendations on how to win back their confidence.

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IMPROVING JUNIOR OFFICER CONFIDENCE IN SENIOR OFFICER LEADERSHIP

“Officer attrition is continuing at a rate that will not allow full manning of the force structure if loss rates continue at the [fiscal year 2000] rate.”

-DCSPER briefing document, 2-star Commanders’
Conference, 19 October 2000¹

There is evidence in the Army today that indicates junior Army officers lack confidence in their senior officers. Studies by independent researchers, officer appointed panels and personal interviews of junior and field grade officers and former battalion commanders confirm this growing problem. This unfortunate lack of confidence is a contributing factor in the growing attrition rates of young captains. Recent surveys and interviews indicate junior officers are choosing to leave the Army, forgoing a 20-year career, in unprecedented numbers. The void left by this extraordinarily large number of year group departures will result in critical manning shortages throughout each cohort’s 30-year legacy. This exodus will also deprive the Army of some of its best and brightest young officers. A second order effect of the crisis in confidence and early departure problems is that disillusioned officers make poor recruiters for Reserve Officer Training Corps, Military Academy and Officer Candidate School cadets. Until the attrition problem is rectified and junior officer confidence is restored, meeting officer manning levels and recruiting the best officers this nation has to offer lies in peril. At present, there appears to be no end in sight to the unsatisfactory numbers of departing young officers. This confidence problem is particularly discerning to the Army Officer Corps, for it shakes the very foundation of what it stands for – leadership by example.

What evidence indicates junior officers are lacking confidence in their senior officers?

Statistics released by the Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel (ODCSPER), Headquarters Department of the Army (HQDA), during the period 1988-1998, indicated that the captain attrition rate increased significantly (Figure 1.) In Fiscal Year (FY) 89, captain attrition was 6.7%. However, between FY97 and FY00, captain attrition increased sharply, with the greatest increase occurring between FY99 and FY00 – 9.6% and 10.6% respectively. To make matters worse, the projected captain attrition rate for FY00 was 13%.²

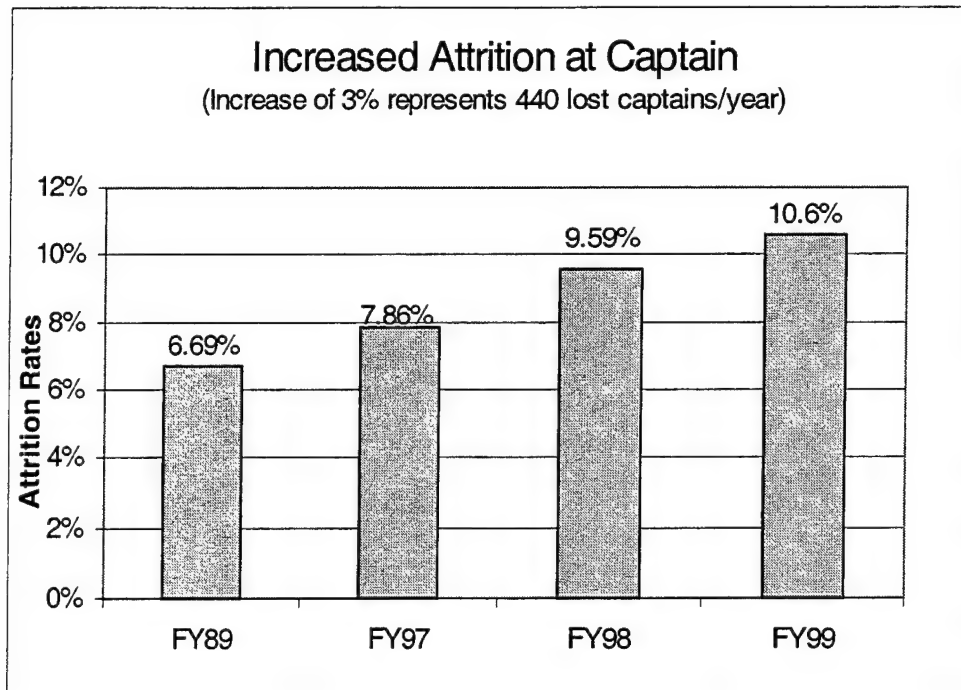


FIGURE 1. CAPTAIN ATTRITION OVER A 10-YEAR PERIOD

According to Army Research Institute (ARI) studies during a 10-year period between 1988 and 1998, junior officer confidence in their senior officers declined. Only six percent (6%) of captains surveyed claimed that they were dissatisfied with their relationships with senior officers. When asked about the overall effectiveness of their senior leaders, only nine percent (9%) of the captains surveyed stated they were dissatisfied. However, in a 1998 ARI study published in the Spring of 1999, eighteen percent (18%) of captains surveyed were dissatisfied with their relationships with senior officers – a three fold increase from the 1988 survey, and seventeen percent (17%) of the captains surveyed were dissatisfied with their senior officers' leadership effectiveness, nearly double the amount from the 1988 survey³ (See Figure 2).

	<u>Percentages of officers expressing dissatisfaction</u>	
	CPTs (1988)	CPTs (1998)
How satisfied are you with relationships with senior/superior officers?	5.7%	17.8%
	<u>Responding with "Poor" or "Very Poor"</u>	
	CPTs (1988)	CPTs (1998)
Overall leadership effectiveness of supervisor/rater?	9.3%	16.6%

FIGURE 2. COMPARISON OF CAPTAINS ATTITUDES TOWARDS SENIOR OFFICERS AND SUPERIORS – 1988 AND 1998

This paper will not argue that a lack of confidence by junior officers towards senior officers is the primary or only reason for the unprecedented officer attrition rate. Other factors such as a stable economy, no emerging near-peer military competitor, sustained high OPTEMPO, multiple deployments, and a mission shift from warfighting to disaster relief, humanitarian assistance, peacekeeping, peace enhancement and peace enforcement operations – now termed Stability and Support Operations (SASO), also contribute to early departure. Also, today's young officers have a different attitude from the previous generations of Army officers. Today's young officers do not feel as compelled as previous generations to make the Army a career.⁴

The Confidence Problem

It is widely recognized in the profession of arms that in order to be an effective fighting organization, confidence in one's seniors, peers and subordinates is crucial to mission success. Indeed, confidence in one's leaders is similarly vital to the successful outcomes of training events and in the conduct of peacetime missions and activities. Leaders at all levels must be keenly attuned to any influences that would undermine the confidence junior officers have in their seniors. It is precisely for this reason that the Army is reacting to the negative findings that junior officers are losing confidence in their seniors. The credibility of the senior Army Officer leadership rests with identifying the problem and rectifying it.

During a fact gathering survey in April 2000, a representative sample of majors attending the Army Command and General Staff College (CGSC) expressed their concerns and the concerns of their subordinate officers over the "direction of the Army." An e-mail, highlighting the most candid of these comments, was made public causing consternation throughout the Army. While not officially denying, acknowledging, or authenticating the majors' concerns, the Army directed a "close hold" study known as a "Blue Ribbon Panel," to gather data on these and other issues. As of this writing, the proceedings, findings and recommendations of this Blue Ribbon Panel remain close hold and under senior officer review.

One of the key issues cited by the young officers in the Fort Leavenworth survey, is that senior officers do not communicate well. Young officers state that their leaders are not communicating their rationale for key decisions. Young officers claim that this lack of communication breeds mistrust. It also does not provide junior officers with the professional development necessary to explain and understand why a decision is made.

Junior officers want their seniors to fully explain the mission. Some young officers claim there is a lack of vision and strategy by seniors for open-ended peacekeeping missions. From the junior officers' perspectives peacekeeping is the overwhelming mission, and warfighting – a mission that many of the junior officers see as the exciting part of the job that motivates them to stay in the Army – is not. The bottom line question in their mind is: What's the Army's mission?

A great many junior officers are concerned about the OER system. Many claim that counseling is not occurring to adequately identify their strengths and weaknesses early enough in the rating period for them to make adjustments to their performance. Junior officers are convinced that only a "top block," or "above center of mass" (ACOM) rating will ensure their upward mobility. They perceive that a "center of mass" (COM) report will ultimately keep them from being promoted and selected for command. Despite numerous reports and statistics produced by the Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel (ODCSPER) over the last two years that indicate officers with one or more COM reports are being selected for promotion and command, junior officers still perceive the COM report as a career-ender.

Junior officers stated that they were not being mentored. The Army encourages a mentorship program. However, personal interviews conducted with eighteen colonels and lieutenant colonels of the Army War College's Class of 2001, indicated that formal mentoring is rare and not occurring at the frequency level originally intended.⁵ Fifteen of the eighteen former battalion commanders, who varied in background, branch, gender and ethnicity, cited OPTEMPO as the cause for the lack of executing a formal mentoring program. Others stated

that each time they spoke with their junior officers, whether it was in the training room, motor pool, during physical fitness training or during formal counseling sessions, that they were in fact “mentoring” their juniors. It was obvious to these former commanders that the junior officers often didn’t realize they were being mentored under those circumstances. Perhaps, in this instance, there is an indication of a communication shortfall, as the mechanics of the mentoring program are perceived differently between senior and junior officers.

Another issue concerning communication that arose during the Fort Leavenworth interviews claimed that seniors were unwilling to listen to their subordinates. Some junior officers claimed that senior officers were incapable of listening because the Army as an institution reinforced the seniors to feel that they were always right. This attitude gave the impression that, “it’s my way or no way.” Junior officers perceived seniors officers to believe themselves “infallible.”

In addition to problems with communication, junior officers cited that they observed many instances where senior officers lacked the leadership traits of personal and morale courage. Junior officers perceived that their lieutenant colonels did not always step up to the plate – that they came across as risk averse. Other junior officers felt their senior commanders were not willing to take risks, and that the subordinates knew it. To junior officers, senior officers appeared to be overly devoted to their own career advancement, rather than to the welfare of their unit or to the quality of mission accomplishment. Still others senior officers appeared to be overly preoccupied with avoiding mistakes. In one example, a junior officer cited that his commander avoided junior officers and their families, and did not explain to soldiers the purpose of particular deployments, nor the impacts the deployments were going to have on the soldiers’ lives, their families and the organization.

Another perception that arose from the junior officer interviews dealt with careerism versus professionalism. Young officers surmised that their senior officers were so concerned over their report cards (OERs) – their “moment in the sun” – that senior commanders would pile on additional training requirements on top of deployments, instead of adjusting training calendars to compensate accordingly. The term “filling in the white space” on the training calendar referred to this practice whose impact resulted in reduced or cancelled time for company and platoon level training events, and virtually eliminated personal family time. While junior officers stated that they understood seniors could not control National Command Authority (NCA) directed missions, they believed that senior commanders could and should have been sensitive to the amount of “white space” left available on the calendar for small unit level training and personal free time. Finally, in what is arguably the most blatant act of careerism – political correctness⁶ -

junior officers stated they observed senior officers making decisions out of political correctness instead of what was right or wrong. Junior officers perceived that senior officers allowed an environment to develop where knee-jerk reactions to adverse publicity prevailed – shotgun blasting everyone in the organization for the actions of a single person or a small group of individuals.

In one of the most critical areas of military culture, that of loyalty – to one's seniors, juniors, the nation and the Army - some junior officers claimed that top down loyalty did not exist. To some, they felt that seniors would sacrifice a subordinate in order to protect his/her career advancement.

As much as loyalty is cherished within the Army, the character trait of integrity is as equally valued if not valued more intensely. Arguably, these two leadership traits are the cornerstones to one of the most mandated principles of leadership – that of leading by example. Therefore it is understandable when junior officers expressed dismay, as they were reported to have done during the Fort Leavenworth interviews, when they perceived senior officers inflating unit readiness ratings to protect or enhance their careers.

Senior officer integrity was also called into question concerning their optimism over quality of life, facilities, infrastructure, and health care. To many young officers (and seniors for that matter), quality of life, facilities, infrastructure and health care are woefully unsatisfactory. Some junior officers blamed senior officer leadership for allowing health care to erode to a sorry state, instead of *falling-on-their-sabers* with the civilian leadership (italics added by author).

Micro-management was an issue. The Fort Leavenworth interviews revealed that many senior officers' unrelenting thirst for more information caused them to "stick their noses" into battalion and company commander business. Senior officers were perceived to be guilty of intervening and micromanaging subordinate commanders' business, rather than focusing on the big picture. Other junior officers perceived senior officers to be focused on high-speed, power point computer presentations instead of the "content" of the briefing – known throughout the army as a "dog and pony show." Still, other junior officers claimed that they felt as if they operated in a "zero defects" environment.

The *Washington Times* newspaper in September 2000, obtained a copy of a report from a private research firm hired by the Army to uncover why soldiers were separating early. The report, submitted to the Army Research Institute (ARI), recorded the following individual responses to the question "Why are you leaving?"⁷

Lieutenant: "The incompetence of higher-ranking officers; specifically their concern of making themselves look good and not properly taking care of the soldiers."

Lieutenant: "The largest problem affecting retention of junior officers is the perception that the senior leadership is completely out of touch with soldiers and their needs. Ticket punching and 'looking good' are the priority."

Lieutenant: "For an Army that is supposed to be the best in the world, the quality of equipment, tanks and other combat vehicles is not only old, but the ability to get parts to accomplish a field exercise is like requesting parts for a nuclear bomb."

Captain: "I will terminate my active military service so that I can be a husband to my wife and a father to my children."

Former Battalion Commanders' Perspectives

In February 2000, the Vice Chief of Staff of the Army (VCSA) sent a message urging commanders to address their young officers' concerns, to tell them that the decision makers heard their concerns, and to tell them that the Army was working hard to take action to fix the problems.⁸ The message highlighted many of the same issues brought out during the Fort Leavenworth interviews already mentioned above: (1) doing more with less; (2) long hours in garrison; (3) high OPTEMPO; (4) fewer resources; (5) zero defects mentality; and (6) micro-management. The VCSA's message indicated many junior officers complained that their responsibilities were being taken away by leaders more concerned with making sure nothing went wrong on their watch, and that "we as senior leaders are either unwilling or unable to understand and address their concerns."⁹ While the message did not overtly target nor blame a particular group of officers, it grabbed the attention of battalion command level officers (lieutenant colonels), many of whom supervised, commanded and rated captains, particularly company commanders. The VCSA's message identified issues that affect the confidence levels of junior officers toward their seniors.

In order to capture colonel and lieutenant colonel viewpoints without the benefit of the Blue Ribbon Panel findings, interviews with eighteen former battalion commanders (FBC) attending the U.S. Army War College at Carlisle Barracks provided their perspectives and opinions on these issues.

The FBCs were asked what specific concerns did junior officers raise to their level during their commands. The commanders said most junior officers wanted to know what was the "end state" in the Balkans. They wanted to know how small the Army was going to get. They wanted to know what was the Army's mission. Many junior officers said that they wanted the senior Army leadership to stop sending surveys and instead, to come out and talk to them. They complained that senior leaders were not "telling it like it is." For example, that there was not enough money to accomplish tasks to standard, or that the Army is experiencing serious equipment shortages and that a lot of our equipment is worn out. Commanders expressed that young officers we're "tired of jumping out of their asses" over one incident, that no one was standing up to contest personnel shortages and that seniors officers had low expectations of junior officer performance.

Other concerns raised by junior officers to the FBCs was the feeling that they were not being allowed to exercise initiative and responsibility to accomplish tasks. That there was no divestiture of tasks, and that no one was willing to remove something from the plate. Many officers complained about the new OER and that there was little to no interaction with their Senior Raters. Many junior officers were afraid to admit that they "screwed up" for fear it would adversely affect their OERs. Other junior officers said that they never heard that it was "OK" to fail from their senior officers. Many juniors were convinced that senior officers were not concerned with their subordinates' welfare. Finally, many junior officers refused to pay attention to a senior officer's guidance, because that officer failed to lead by example.

The FBCs were asked how often they talked to their junior officers and in what manner did they address them. Every FBC responded that they conducted formal performance counseling from 2 to 4 times per year, depending on OPTEMPO. All senior officers interviewed stated that they performed additional formal and informal counseling and/or mentoring by talking with juniors during Quarterly Training Briefs (QTB), Officer Professional Development (OPD) sessions, military balls, monthly hails and farewells, monthly visits to subordinate organizations, "footlocker" counseling, "beef" sessions, visits to the motorpools, supply rooms and platoon areas, and during weekly attendance to "prime time" training sessions.

The FBCs were asked if they felt a crisis in confidence in senior officer leadership existed in the Army today, and why. Two of the commanders said no. One said it is no different today than it was when he was a lieutenant and captain, and the other said he never experienced it. For the rest of the former commanders who said yes, some said that seniors are perceived as too political – that the junior officers feel that the seniors don't care about them. Many stated that junior officers lost confidence from the misconduct they read or heard about

being perpetrated by senior officers. Other former commanders believed that some senior officers are more concerned with themselves than with their junior officers. One of the former commanders stated that a gap exists between the Generation X (junior officers) and the Baby Boomers (senior officers).¹⁰ He believed that the Boomers are workaholics and that they look down on the junior officers who complain by telling them to "Quit your sniveling." One former commander stated he believed junior officers lose confidence because they do not see senior officers making the big picture decisions, that they only see it from their perspective. Finally the former commanders unanimously blamed high OPTEMPO, poor counseling techniques and a lack of intestinal fortitude to say, "Stop! We don't have the resources!"

The former battalion commanders were asked to express their opinions as to which level they believed this problem could be attributed. One out of the 18 former commanders interviewed stated that some of the responsibility rests at the lieutenant colonel level, but that most of the responsibility must be assumed by the general officers. Another former commander fixed responsibility on the lieutenant colonels, saying that some experience difficulty transitioning on how to respond to troops from their position as battalion commander, and not as a company commander. A third former commander cited the confidence problem was occurring across all officer ranks. The remaining 15 former commanders stated that the crux of the issue lies with the general officers. Specifically, the observation was made that the Chief of Staff of the Army (CSA) should endeavor to become more visible in presenting his vision, guidance, intent and philosophy out to the field. An observation was made that the CSA relies too much on his Public Affairs Office (PAO). Comments centered on the Army general officer corps stating that some general officers focus too much on the close fight (issues normally the responsibility of colonels and lieutenant colonels) instead of providing vision & guidance for the future. Several former commanders believed that some of today's general officers are not making policy that's best for the army, but are instead being maneuvered by political correctness.

The FBCs were asked to provide what they felt were possible options the senior leadership should consider to help alleviate the confidence problem. Answers centered mainly on all officers, lieutenant colonel and up. One comment was senior leadership must acquire more assets or cut mission requirements. More money, personnel, equipment, pay, benefits, and quality of life facilities were high on the list. Another officer commented that senior officers must understand the implications of what they are committing to when they say "100% fill," or that "we're ready to go to war." One former commander said senior officers must understand that they have to get their hands dirty – that they need to learn to manage by dissent, meaning

that seniors officers must be attuned to the levels of dissatisfaction voiced by their junior officers and not arbitrarily dismiss them as merely "whining." The concept of chain teaching was criticized. Several officers said we need to stop powering down to the lowest level to fix problems, e. g., chain teaching for consideration of others training, downsizing initiatives, sexual harassment and homosexual policies because it gives an impression to the junior officers that the highest echelons of senior leaders are absolved from the hot issues and therefore absolved from taking responsibility. During chain teaching the only senior officer visible who discusses these hot buttons are the lieutenant colonels - and they don't approve the policies.

Finally, the former battalion commanders emphasized that senior officers must teach juniors about leadership – not positional leadership, but rather what it takes to be a good leader. They need to develop credibility with their juniors by leading by example and showing genuine concern for their welfare.

The former commanders were asked to give their impressions of today's junior Army officers. Most said they were smart, sharp and loyal – looking for guidance from seniors, especially from the general officers. Many have lots of drive, are savvy yet different. They believe "if I can't get it done by 1700, I'm out of here anyway." Nearly all said that the junior officers are very patriotic. Many senior officers felt the juniors are more articulate, more technologically aware and eager for challenges. They don't value idle time but do value their time. They view the service more like the business world. Many of today's junior officers do not appear to be intimidated by authority. The junior officer today does not like "make work." They feel that they have a right to question authority. They're hard working and dedicated. Nearly every former battalion commander stated that they were all impressed with the vast majority of junior officers. They ask more questions, worry more about their future, and are more discriminating about getting out or staying in the army. They are focused more on opportunities after the army than the previous generation of officers.

The final question posed to the former battalion commanders was to solicit their opinions of today's senior Army officers? All were impressed with many of today's general officers. "Darn good," one former commander stated. " Good Brigadier Generals and up are in the 90 percentile. There are still a lot of darn good officers out there - integrity, selfless service – it is all there." However, some general officers were perceived as weak in reference to loyalty down the chain of command. Several of the former commanders stated that they observed a tendency by some general officers to fail to underwrite mistakes. For example, one division commander was perceived to be so concerned about his next star that he defaulted to someone to blame each time a mistake was made instead of assuming the blame himself. Several

comments cited brigadier generals as the worst offenders, claiming that they were perceived to be too concerned with getting "that next bullet" (star). Some senior officers were observed as too wrapped up in political correctness, afraid to "bet their stars." Some were perceived as caring more for themselves than for the soldier. Some senior officers focused more on satisfying their bosses. They focused up rather than down.

The issue of communication, or lack of it, surfaced with the former commanders. One former commander (besides the author) wanted to know why the Blue Ribbon Panel was being kept close hold and not public knowledge, or at least distributed throughout the officer corps. Another former commander wanted to know why the Army didn't explain to the field the reason this year's colonel's promotion list was held up. Other former commanders observed that senior leaders were not counseling the junior officers. It was noted that in a world where one has to do "more with less" all of the time, counseling falls to the wayside. Still others mentioned that while many senior officers are technically proficient, they are not good at talking with their juniors. "They're uncomfortable with it."

Perceptions or Reality

While the Blue Ribbon Panel continues its study into the validity of these issues, the essential point to resolve is that there is a strong perception that junior officers lack confidence in their senior Army officers. It is fact that junior officer confidence levels in their senior officers have declined over the last 10 years. It is fact that junior officers, especially captains, are departing the Army in unprecedented and dangerous numbers.

It is also Army culture that leaders are expected to understand, address and deal with soldiers' perceptions as reality. Perceptions, whether true or false, can adversely affect unit morale, esprit de corps and cohesiveness. Should junior officers continue to perceive their senior officers negatively, it is highly probable their confidence in those senior officers - perhaps all senior officers - will remain suspect. Consequently, continued lack of confidence in senior officers will contribute to junior officer attrition rates. The Army must defeat these perceptions. Just as importantly, the Army must learn lessons from reality.

For example, continued congressionally mandated defense budget reductions over the last 10 years resulted in strategic decisions by Army leaders to prioritize program allocations. Base Operations (BASOPS) received the lowest priority for budgeting when competing against operational requirements, research and development of new weapons systems, maintenance of current weapons systems, and training. This strategic decision had an adverse impact on

quality of life (QOL) programs Army-wide. This decision shook junior officer confidence in their senior leaders. It might have had less of an impact upon junior officers had the senior officers initiated a preemptive informational campaign, personally explaining the reasoning behind their prioritization decisions. This may have helped to convince junior officers that senior Army leaders did everything possible to win congressional support to improve Army QOL problems. At the least, it would have provided senior Army officers the opportunity to own up to their decisions, and set the proper leadership example for junior officers.

Another possible lesson learned was the 1997 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR). Many argue that the 1997 QDR led the Army's strategy to be budget rather than capabilities driven. Since the National Security Strategy (NSS) and Nation Military Strategy (NMS) objectives exceeded the Army's budget allocation necessary to accomplish those objectives, a delta resulted in capabilities versus strategic objectives. Ultimately, this budget shortfall led to a deliberate assumption of operational risk. Importantly, it also resulted in low fiscal allocations for Army QOL programs. Therefore, the decisions by senior Army officers as a result of the 1997 QDR, impacted directly upon the quality of living and working conditions for soldiers and their families.

A third lesson learned was the strategic decision to reduce Army end strength (faces) faster than structure (spaces). This led to the CSA's leadership decision to eventually man the Army's combat divisions to 100% of their personnel authorizations. The second and third order effects of this decision critically undermanned the TDA units, most of which provided direct training support to the divisions and installation support for family members (QOL). Personnel shortages in TDA organizations increased, not reduced, the workload. This increased workload all but eliminated available family time for those officers working to compensate for the TDA manpower shortages.

One final example is the rotation of strategic leaders every 2-4 years. This system witnesses a change in the Commander-in-Chief, Secretary of the Army, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Chief of Staff of the Army. This results in a change in the National Security Strategy, which in turn affects the National Military Strategy and ultimately the prioritization of the Army's Program, Planning, Budgeting and Execution System (PPBES). Rotational leadership occurs more rapidly than the PPBES can accommodate changing priorities. Therefore some promised programs never see the light of day. Changes in the positions regularly result in strategic priority shifts from their predecessors. Multiple changes and shifts in priorities are perceived by young officers to portray a disharmonious or personal-agenda-setting corps of senior Army officers.

Senior officers should take advantage of this approach by reviewing organizational change and thinking through each relationship. It will remind them that they cannot change one part of the organization without in some sense, changing the whole.¹¹

Long Term Implications

We are experiencing today the implications of strategic decisions made 10 years ago. We are also experiencing the long-term effects of Army culture. There's an old Army saying, "Don't worry about the mules, keep loading the wagons." Its Army culture to "suck it up and drive on – can do, sir!" However, one must weigh Army culture against 10 years of doing more with less, 10 years of uncertainty during the draw down years, 10 years of diminishing defense budgets with increased deployments, and wide-spread BASOPS infrastructure deterioration. Many young officers attribute these issues to senior officer reluctance to break the Army's "can do at all costs" attitude, instead of demonstrating moral courage before Congress - sacrificing their careers if necessary - to correct these problems.

Some senior officers view today's junior officers' inability to withstand austere times as "the wimp factor." Others attribute it to a gap between the Baby Boomers and Generation X officers. However, before one attributes today's confidence ills to a generational gap, one might review recent senior officer attrition rates.

Within the last five years there's been an increase per capita in the number of lieutenant colonels and colonels who declined command, notwithstanding an increase in command opportunities since FY98.¹² Likewise, since FY96, there's been an increase in the number of lieutenant colonels and colonels departing the Army. Colonel attrition rates increased from 13.6% in FY96, to 20% in FY99. Lieutenant Colonel attrition rates increased from 9.9% in FY96, to 13.3% in FY99.¹³ Could this be an indication that some of the same issues junior officers are struggling over in deciding their Army career intentions are also affecting senior officers? Are colonels and lieutenant colonels losing confidence in the strategic direction of their senior leaders and are therefore departing the Army in unprecedented numbers – just like the captains? This warrants further study. However, one can't help but wonder if perhaps the time has finally come to consider the mules' before continuing to load the wagons.

Recommendations

What can be done to reclaim junior officer confidence in senior officers? Senior officers

must reach consensus on the Army transformation vision and demonstrate unity towards its end state. The measure of success will be whether or not the vision remains consistent when the senior leadership at the CSA level changes.

We must build on our commonalities, i.e., patriotism; selfless service; loyalty to country, the Army and each other. Junior officers are just as patriotic and dedicated as their seniors. Focus on what makes us unique and special to one another, not what sets us apart.

Lead by example, both on and off duty. This is by far the number one priority.

Communicate. This is nonnegotiable. Leaders at all levels need to make time for counseling, even if they have to take something off of the plate. They must have the moral courage to tell their bosses they're over committed and that they will not sacrifice developing their junior officers for a lower priority project. If senior officers are attuned to units needs, preferably by first-hand, boots-on-the-ground observations, they should provide relief, even if that means falling on their sabers with their senior leaders in order to establish balance between mission and taking care of their people.

Mentoring. We should look at changing our current philosophy about mentoring. It is not the junior officer's job to seek out a mentor (although they should not be discouraged from doing so if that's what they wish to do). It is the duty of every officer, regardless of position, to professionally mentor all officers under their charge. One of the first orders of business as a leader is to teach officers the difference between professionalism and careerism.

A January 1996 Marine Corps Gazette article asked, "Where Have All the Mentors Gone? Mentoring: The Lost Part of Leadership."¹⁴ The author, Marine Captain James Gfrerer, identified four key areas that senior leaders, regardless of branch of service, need to focus upon in order to continue to develop and retain the respect and confidence of their junior officers:

- As the Armed Forces become more technically oriented, we risk losing our focus on our people, specifically our junior officers.
- Commanders who make counseling a priority will succeed. They know that their people come first, and that time talking with junior officers is not a distraction, but a requirement.
- Regrettably, time is precious and, in the pressing tasks of the day, [junior/senior] interaction gets the short shrift.

- Commanders who fail to mentor their junior officers jeopardize the success of their unit and mission. Even more importantly, they do a disservice to their service and to the nation.

Senior officers must allow juniors to make mistakes without fear of retribution. This will ensure initiative, assumption of personal responsibility and professional development.

Personal time. Carve out time for quality of life – even if that means slowing down the train. Unless combat is imminent or the security of the nation hangs in the balance, allow time to tend the mules – they'll pull twice as hard and twice as long if they have the opportunity to recover between hauls. Their families will appreciate it too.

Leaders must make time to formulate and execute official and social events that focus primarily on team building, camaraderie, family time and group family interaction. One example of how senior leaders could help encourage soldier participation and bolster attendance to these types of team building functions is to change transportation regulations. Permit commanders and responsible supervisors to use non-tactical military vehicles to transport soldiers and their families to unit sponsored social events that builds teams, improves quality of life, and esprit de corps – especially when alcohol is served.

Stand up for principles. Senior officers must press upon the congressional leaders that pay is low in comparison to responsibility. Senior officers must be unrelenting concerning the quality of single soldier barracks, administrative facilities, motor pools and family housing - it is woefully inadequate, particularly those overseas.

When a senior officer makes a decision, controversial or not, he or she must own up to the decision and then get out to the field personally – be visible – speak to the key issues e.g., policy towards homosexuals, sexual harassment, crisis in confidence, consideration of others, Army transformation – don't keep it close hold and do not use chain teaching as the primary method to announce policy changes. While chain teaching is a method, controversial issues should be publicly announced from the highest echelons to the lowest rank and file. Chain teaching as practiced today puts the onus on the lieutenant colonel commander or mid-level supervisor. From the young officers' perspective, the only senior officer he sees making sweeping army-wide policy announcements is the battalion commander or the lieutenant colonel staff officer – who do not make Army policy.

Do what's right, not what's politically correct. For example, when socially accepted norms conflict with military values and culture, senior Army officers must convince our civilian

leadership that the preservation of our values and culture take precedence. Senior Army officers must demonstrate courage off of the battlefield, too.

Discipline. Make it hard, Spartan-like, and unique by civilian standards, tough, fair and consistent. It must be administered by leaders who epitomize discipline in all that they do, both on and off duty.

Return to the eleven principles of leadership – resurrect them from the pages of obscurity and highlight them once again in FM 22-100. Return to proven leadership doctrine (1953 to 1990) that embraces, teaches and personifies the eleven principles of leadership and the 14 leadership traits.¹⁵ Had this been done earlier, there would have been no need to come up with a set of “values” for new recruits. Doctrinal leadership traits and leadership principles have always been and should remain the Army’s “values.”

We must vigorously reaffirm our trust in the principles of leadership and ingrain them once again into the Officer Corps. It should be mandatory that all officers, throughout their careers, at all ranks, be evaluated in their teaching, adherence to and personal demonstration of basic leadership principles and traits. They should be reinforced during every counseling and/or mentoring session. They should figure prominently in the OER. If senior Army officers adhere to those powerful leadership principles by practicing them daily, enforcing them as the standard, and instilling them into their subordinates, junior officer confidence in their senior officers will be high.

Summary

This paper identified that while the majority of junior officers have confidence in their senior officers, a significant number of officers lack confidence in senior officer leadership. While the reasons vary, many junior officers are voicing their dissatisfaction by leaving the Army in alarmingly high numbers. Lack of confidence in senior leaders is disconcerting to professional soldiers who pride themselves in personifying leadership by example. Yet the perception exists that senior leaders are not living up to the standards expected of them by their juniors. While the Army searches for methods to enhance connectivity with junior officers, one feasible solution is to return to the time-honored, traditional, basic leadership principles that made this Army great. Ironically, those basic principles of leadership taught to generations of Army officers have faded from current Army leadership doctrine. Returning to the basics of sound leadership principles will allow senior officers to reconnect with their junior officers, deal

effectively with their professional development and their problems, and regain the special trust and confidence essential to Army unit cohesiveness.

It is particularly difficult for successful leaders to look inward at their personal leadership styles and judge if they are the cause of the problem. Proudly, Army leaders accept and assume responsibility for what goes wrong. Army leaders are engrained from the day they enter military service to "lead by example."

The point is to build simple, yet solid foundations, keeping core leadership principles and practices easily understood and identifiable. Emphasizing basic leadership skills makes training junior officers consistent across the Army, and reinforces the unique bond that binds us together in common ideology.

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ENDNOTES

¹ DCSPER Briefing to 2-Star Commanders' Conference, 19 October 2000.

² DCSPER Briefing Charts Presented to 2-Star Conference, 19 October 2000.

³ Wong, Leonard, Generations Apart: Xers and Boomers in the Officer Corps, Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, October 2000. p. 17.

⁴ Ibid., p. 12.

⁵ Personal Interviews With Student Army Officers Attending U.S. Army War College, AY 01, October 2000 through February 2001.

⁶ Political correctness is defined for this paper as acquiescing to or allowing socially accepted norms, trends or fads that conflict with military values and culture, to influence military strategy and policy decisions.

⁷ Gertz, Bill and Scarborough, Rowan, Army Gripes, Inside the Ring, Washington Times, 22 September 2000, available from <http://ebird.dtic.mil/Sep2000/E200000922inside.htm>, accessed 22 September 2000.

⁸ MSG: 151038Z, VCSA, Washington DC, No Subject (U), to AIG 7406, AIG 7446, ARSTAFF.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Wong.

¹¹ Don Hellriegel, John W. Slocum, Jr., and Richard W. Woodman, Organizational Behavior, Cincinnati, Ohio.: South-Western College, 1998, p. 580-581.

¹² DCSPER Briefing Charts, 19 October 2000.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Gfrerer, James P. "Where Have All the Mentors Gone? Mentoring: The Lost Part of Leadership." Marine Corps Gazette 80 (January 1996): 40-42.

¹⁵ Department of the Army, Military Leadership, Field Manual 22-100, (Washington D.C.: U.S. Department of the Army, 29 June 1973).

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